

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Oversight Committee

FROM: IBSSS Task Force

DATE: May 23, 2005

SUBJ: IBSSS Task Force Report and Recommendations

Creation of Task Force	In September 2004, the Education and Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents approved a work plan for study of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School.
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Purpose of Task Force	<p>The purpose of the IBSSS Task Force was to examine the future needs and solutions for all students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities. The Task Force was asked to encourage knowledgeable involvement from all stakeholders. The Task Force was asked to address the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☛ Are there services or learning experiences the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School can offer or develop to further support the education and growth of all students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities?☛ Are there possible collaborations with other Regent institutions which further the mission of all? Are there other organizations with whom collaborations would be of benefit?☛ Are existing services provided in the most effective and efficient manner?
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Recommendations	After extensive fact finding and deliberative discussions, the IBSSS Task Force developed the following recommendations.
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Recommendation 1	<p>The IBSSS Task Force recommends that the Board of Regents and the State Board of Education create a Coordinating Council to review all services which support the education of students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities. The Coordinating Council should include representatives from agencies that provide services, those who receive services, and other stakeholders¹. Furthermore, using the result of the review, the Coordinating Council should consider preparation of a plan that describes the services based upon the needs of children aged birth to 21 and their families. The Task Force believes that these services should be complementary, be provided in the most effective and efficient manner, and make maximum use of existing fiscal and personnel resources.</p>
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¹Other stakeholders might include, but not be limited to, consumers, Kirkwood Community College, the Iowa Department of Health, medical providers, and the Iowa Department for the Blind.

Recommendation 2 The IBSSS Task Force recommends that the Board of Regents and the State Board of Education ensure that access to the following services is equitably available regardless of a student's residence. The Task Force suggests that the two Boards facilitate development of inter-agency agreements for the purpose of coordinating services to students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities, throughout the state. The inter-agency agreements should provide for equitable and timely access to:

- ☞ Full continuum of services;
 - ☞ Certified orientation and mobility specialist services;
 - ☞ Braille instruction by certified teachers of the visually impaired;
 - ☞ Age-appropriate materials in alternative media;
 - ☞ Resource library of materials for students, families, and professionals;
 - ☞ Assistive technology with lending capacity and technical support;
 - ☞ Specialized assessments, e.g., low vision clinics and others;
 - ☞ Professional development that includes on-time/in-time assistance for general and special education teachers of students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities, in their classrooms or other educational settings;
 - ☞ Transition and vocational services; and
 - ☞ Expanded core curriculum.
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Recommendation 3 The IBSSS Task Force recommends that discussions begin between IBSSS and the University of Northern Iowa with the objective of creating a rigorous academic program for students with visual impairments. This program could become a "magnet school" for students in Iowa and the Midwest¹.

¹The Task Force did not have enough information to suggest a location for the program.

Recommendation 4 The IBSSS Task Force recommends that the structure of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of students for the core and expanded core curriculum, regardless of the students' primary program location. The Task Force believes that IBSSS must emphasize shared responsibility with local school districts and area education agencies for students during their school career. Considerations for flexibility might include the following: an alternative calendar year that would allow intensive focus during the summer months and an option for a shorter term residential program (one semester or less) with a full range of activities and services for all students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities.

Recommendation 5 The IBSSS Task Force recommends further exploration of collaboration with the University of Northern Iowa and the University of Iowa to enhance services for students with multiple impairments and pursue efficiencies in the delivery of those services.

Recommendation 6 The IBSSS Task Force recommends that IBSSS, in cooperation with other agencies, intensify efforts to inform parents of students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities, of all the services available statewide. The Task Force recommends promoting a central point of contact regarding information about services for individuals with visual impairments, aged birth to 21. There should be particular efforts to reach the parents of infants and young children through the medical community, the faith community, and other community resources. Existing efforts should be complemented by outreach efforts for parents of older students as needs change over time.

Recommendation 7 The IBSSS Task Force recommends that the Board of Regents convene a group to develop standards and benchmarks for achievement of the expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities. The Task Force further recommends that the standards and benchmarks be disseminated and implemented statewide.

Next Steps

- ☛ The IBSSS Task Force will present its report and recommendations to the Board of Regents' Education and Student Affairs Committee in June 2005 for review and discussion.
- ☛ The Education and Student Affairs Committee will present its recommendations to the Board of Regents.

Background:

Task Force Membership

The following individuals were appointed by the Board of Regents to serve on the IBSSS Task Force:

- ☞ Dr. Amir Arbisser - Pediatric Ophthalmologist and Regent
 - ☞ Ms. LeeAnn Back - AEA 12 Teacher of the Visually Impaired
 - ☞ Dr. Mary Ellen Becker - Regent Education and Student Affairs Committee Chair and Regent
 - ☞ Ms. Connie Buffum - Parent of an IBSSS Visually Impaired Student
 - ☞ Mr. Seth Cooper – School District Graduate
 - ☞ Sr. Jude Fitzpatrick – State Board of Education Member
 - ☞ Dr. Jeananne Hagen – AEA Special Education Director
 - ☞ Mr. Thomas Howsare – Parent of District Visually Impaired Student
 - ☞ Ms. Karen Keninger – IBSSS Graduate
 - ☞ Mr. Al Leff – Business Person and Former School Board Member
 - ☞ Ms. Lana Michelson – Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Children, Family, and Community Services Chief
 - ☞ Dr. Beverly Smith – Former Regent and Chair of Task Force
 - ☞ Ms. Deb Wilberg – IBSSS Teacher of the Visually Impaired
 - ☞ Mr. Don Williams – Business Person and Former School Board Member
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Support Staff to Task Force

The following individuals provided staff support to the Task Force:

- ☞ Dr. Carol Bradley – Board Office Consultant
 - ☞ Dr. Diana Gonzalez – Board Office Staff
 - ☞ Dr. Karen Blankenship – State Vision Consultant
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Meeting Schedule

The Task Force met on the following dates - October 27, 2004; December 7, 2004; February 1, 2005; March 9, 2005; March 29, 2005; and April 20, 2005.

October 27, 2004

The following items were included in the agenda for this meeting that was held at the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School:

- ☞ Tour of School
- ☞ Presentation of information regarding IBSSS demographics and performance; services provided by IBSSS (on-campus and off-campus); budget/cost; and facilities.

- ☞ Early childhood to transition age data; state report card for children with disabilities.
 - ☞ Presentation by the superintendent of the Kansas State School for the Blind on “Differing Service Delivery Models” for educational services for children with who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities.
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December 7, 2004

The following items were included in the agenda for this meeting that was held in Ankeny:

- ☞ Presentation by the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa.
 - ☞ Presentation by the president of the Iowa Council of the United Blind.
 - ☞ Presentation of the services provided by IBSSS.
 - ☞ Presentation on the state report card for children with disabilities.
 - ☞ Presentation of the IBSSS facilities.
 - ☞ Cost for educating students on-campus; comparison of educational costs and residential costs between IBSSS and other schools, including the Council of Schools for the Blind Research Study.
 - ☞ Presentation of services provided by the Iowa Department of Education.
 - ☞ Presentation of AEA services and funding.
 - ☞ Presentation of how services to students have been affected in states that have closed or modified their residential programs.
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February 1, 2005

The following items were included in the agenda for this meeting that was held in Johnston:

- ☞ Presentation by Task Force member and graduate of IBSSS.
 - ☞ Presentation by two parents of IBSSS students and one parent of a district school parent.
 - ☞ Information regarding visually impaired students attending public schools.
 - ☞ Clarification of roles of IBSSS, AEAs, and the Iowa Department of Education.
 - ☞ Task Force members’ overall impressions about providing services to students with visual disabilities.
 - ☞ Discussion of format for public input to preliminary recommendations.
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March 9, 2005	<p>The following items were included in the agenda for this meeting that was held in Urbandale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☛ Presentation by Task Force member and graduate of district school. ☛ Discussion of number of visually impaired students and teachers of the visually impaired by AEA. ☛ Discussion of possible recommendations.
March 29, 2005	<p>This meeting was held on the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) to invite and solicit public comments regarding the Task Force's preliminary recommendations. There were 19 ICN sites¹ provided to enhance ease of attendance for interested persons. Some sites were hosted by Task Force members; others were hosted by Board Office staff, IBSSS staff, and Department of Education staff. There were 122 participants at the 19 sites.</p> <p>Having received the preliminary recommendations ahead of time, the ICN participants had an opportunity to share their comments about each of the recommendations. Individuals who were not able to participate at one of the ICN sites had an opportunity to submit their comments to the Board Office by fax and by postal, electronic, and voice mail. A total of 22 individuals submitted their comments using one of these media.</p>
April 20, 2005	<p>At this meeting, the Task Force reviewed the preliminary recommendations that had been revised using public input and comments and adopted the final recommendations for submission to the Education and Students Affairs Committee.</p>
Availability of Information to the Public	<p>Throughout the process of deliberations by the IBSSS Task Force, all pertinent materials and information were made available on a timely basis to the public and the media on the Board of Regents website.</p>
Appointment of Interim Superintendent	<p>In May 2005, the Board appointed Dr. Jeananne Hagen Schild as the interim superintendent of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School, effective July 1, 2005. Dr. Schild will provide leadership in the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Board of Regents.</p>

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¹ Bettendorf, Carroll, Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, Clear Lake, Council Bluffs, Creston, Des Moines (2), Dubuque, Estherville, Fort Dodge, Marshalltown, Ottumwa, Sioux Center, Sioux City, Vinton (2), Waterloo, and West Burlington.